

***Prevention of Violence and Extremism: International  
Findings and Approaches***

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## **Prevention of Violence and Extremism: International Findings and Approaches**

During the years, terrorism and extremist violence have particularly been on the rise in Western Countries as well as in the Middle East – Central Asia and mainly North Africa. Extremist groups justify violence by exploiting development problems as well as inequality, poverty, poor governance and gender constructions. On the one hand, states have reacted with hard security measures. On the other hand radicalization and violent extremism remains a great challenge to societies by itself. Therefore, different countries implement and expand prevention programmes which handle with family problems, lack of perspectives, uprooting etc.

The International Conference on the Prevention of Violence and Extremism aims at facilitating the active exchange between practitioners, researchers and policy makers in the fields of crime prevention and prevention of violent extremism, short PVE. It provides a forum for good practices and assists in establishing national and international networks. Participants presented and discuss innovative and successful approaches, methods or findings and foster their competences regarding the prevention of crime and violent extremism.

The first conference “Countering Violent Extremism: Building an evidence-base for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism” took place on June 16-18, 2017 in Hanover and was hosted by the National Center for Crime Prevention (NCCP) and GCOCP and founded by the Federal Ministry of Interior. The second one was hosted by GCOCP on November 8-9, 2018 at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, short GIZ, in Eschborn, Germany. (For some impressions visit our website at [www.pve-conference.org](http://www.pve-conference.org).)

## The Conference

Numerous international and national experts from various fields were present at the conference to participate in three panels and three workshops. Experts from science, practice and politics took advantage of the conference to exchange views on developments in the field of prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

The first Panel “What are we talking about? Terms and concepts in an international perspective“ focused on definitions in the field of Violent Extremism and Prevention. An exchange took place on their theoretical and practical implications, because approaches in PVE vary from country to country. They have different aims, budget and underlying philosophies. These aspects are rooted in political, cultural and legal elements which are unique for every country.

Panel II “Sharing experiences – insights into the practice of PVE“ addressed the diversity of PVE activities, not only in Western Countries but also in the Middle East and North Africa. The panellists presented projects methodological approaches and raised the questions: What works on the ground?, Who are the right partners to work with? What are common challenges?

This led to the question of Panel III “How effective are we? – Indicators and evaluation methods”. To know more about measuring the effectiveness of PVE activities are important for further development, maintenance and financing of measures. The panellists talked about adequate indicators and benchmarks for preventing violent extremism successfully.

The workshops facilitated an in-depth exchange of knowledge, new findings and approaches on PVE for all participants.

The workshop I “PVE and local authorities – Needs, competencies, services and support” thematized the increasing recognition among policymakers on national and international levels that the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism must be rooted locally. Local authorities are important partners when it comes to building resilience among young people, supporting communities, reintegrating formers or developing alternative narratives. The participants discussed how radicalisation can be prevented at the local level, how measures can be planned and implemented at the local level and how the support

of a variety of interest groups can be won. A look at already proven programmes and methods as well as the question of how support from other levels of government can look like were further elements of the workshop.

The workshop II focused on the topic of “How to prevent recidivism and radicalisation in prison, probation and release.” The role of prisons and probation officers in preventing violent extremism and preventing radicalisation is repeatedly questioned. While prisons have often been seen as “breeding grounds” for radicalisation, effective prevention measures can be implemented there. The workshop focused on how successful rehabilitation and resocialisation measures for prisoners should be designed, what role prisons, probation officers, local and European authorities and civil society could play in these efforts.

Workshop III “The Role of Religion in PVE – Potentials and Challenges” dealt with the role of religious actors in prevention work. They already play an important role in their communities and have networks that extend to the remotest corners of the world. The role of religious leaders, narratives and institutions is therefore important in preventing violent extremism. Religious values and beliefs are influencing the thoughts and behaviour of billions of people. The workshop focused on what international cooperation and practice with religious leaders and institutions in the field of the PVE could look like. It also discussed the potentials, challenges and pitfalls of working with religious actors in the field of PVE and the practical approaches that work best.

## **Conclusions and further considerations**

Crime Prevention embraces a lot of fields of work like violence against the elderly and children, violence in sport, radicalization. Islamist, right wing and left wing extremism are only exemplary fields, but sometimes it seems that handling with violent extremism has become a part of everyday life. It is therefore and because of the hazard situation not surprising that the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism ranks high on the international political and social agenda. The conference showed that combinations of different approaches and actors have been proved successfully. In the development policy context measures are broadly based to address national challenges like low financial resources, regime change or (civil) war. Although, PVE is a global challenge, the answers need to be local, contact sensitive and

require a certain level of security. The approaches combine and range from psycho-social support, provision of education, assistance in finding work to community policing. The crucial role of state institutions in developing countries where also discussed. Even if many measures do not consult with them, because corruption and nepotism are often the order of the day, a certain contact and arrangements are necessary to maintain ownership and financial support. Nevertheless, having the support of the government is no guarantee that all planned measures can be implemented.

Further, the projects must have a high degree of flexibility, because they have to react to unexpected developments and trends in PVE. This often results in short project durations, but it contrasts with the fact that it has been shown on a national and international level that the effect of measures only becomes visible over a longer period of time.

As regards the question of indicators and factors for a successful measure, three aseptic aspects came to the fore: Firstly, The formulation and communication of objectives and terms are important for the comparability of measures, though tailor-made evaluation instruments have to be developed for each measure. Secondly, practitioners have to test assumptions and association; about radicalization and recruitment. The failure and success of measures can be used to draw conclusions for efficient measures. Therefore, negative experiences must also be shared. Thirdly, it remained open what is a suitable theory to describe what constitutes a change and consequently also the success of a measure.

At both the national and international level, there are many projects that have gained a lot of interesting findings that need to be communicated. Therefore, the following contributions by conference participants provide an insight into relevant topics and findings of the prevention of radicalisation on the national and the international level.

Frank Buchheit sketches the “Police Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Baden-Württemberg”, Maarten van de Donk illustrates the “Prevention of radicalisation in the context of prison and probation — insights from the Radicalisation Awareness Network”, Christina Foerch gives an insight into the work with “Fighters for Peace” in Libanon and Lilah Elsayed shows the “MENA Governments’ Efforts for Alternative and Counter-Narratives”.

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